

# 158-168 Western Avenue Zoning Proposal

To the Honorable City Council,

I am filing to ask that the Business BA-3 zone on Western Avenue currently in existence from Howard to Jay Streets be extended onto the even number side of Western Avenue from Jay Street to Kinnaird Street. This only affects 3 small buildings on this short block: 158 (Lot 125-25), 162 (Lot 125-24) and 168 (125-3) Western Avenue, a small block only 3 short blocks from the Mass Ave intersection. See zone extension graphic and diorama pic of area. See support letter from the immediate neighbor/owner of 162 Western. There are no parking issues in this area and making this change will not create any either

## Background:

**Shortage:** There are very few options every year for a small business or a professional to buy an affordable small-sized commercial building in Cambridge. Unlike the residential market that features hundreds of listings for sale at any given time, very few commercial properties ever go on the market, and when they do, they are usually too large and too expensive for most small businesses or professionals to afford. Smaller sized, more affordable buildings are extremely rare. For example in 2014, there were *two* for sale under \$1M. One was an auto mechanics/garage building on Broadway that required expensive remediation, updating, and general construction to bring it to code. Another was the Go Management's offices at 2534 Mass Ave listed at \$795K that required a full gut rehab as the connected old Victorian house was in awful condition. Both eventually costing their new owners well over \$1M to make them useful commercial buildings. There is a large need for affordable commercial property for sale to entrepreneurs, small business owners and professionals in order to help maintain an eclectic balance as well as Cambridge's world renowned status for entrepreneurship. Acerbating this shortage, in the past two years, eight "BA" zone ground floor retail spaces have been removed and replaced with residential due to the high demand for Res vs the low income producing nature of neighborhood retail.

**Growth:** With the recent massive increase in building in East Cambridge (especially North Point) and North Cambridge, and future proposed building in those areas as well as in Central Square, there is now and will continue to be significantly more high-end office, lab, and residential space available. Coupled, in the service of increasing residential housing, the variance board has been granting variances to many who are building in their backyard. See a few examples in the "Backyard Building Graphic." So there are high-end commercial rental options being created as well as residential living options in the service to increase housing (which will forever be a constant since so many want to live in Cambridge) but again, proportionally with this new continuing density, not much is available to service the needs of small business and professionals who are the human faces that make Cambridge the vibrant place that it has historically been and should continue to be so in the future.



**Balance:** Since there are a few and limited finite numbers of structures to serve the underserved small business and professional community that have reached the position to own their own buildings—what is a possible solution? Rezoning certain areas that are major arteries that can serve a mixed use community.

We feel that to preserve and enhance the existing ratios of small businesses and offices in this particular mixed use neighborhood and to keep pace with the tremendous building and variance granting that has vastly increased the density of mega-expensive office buildings and housing in Cambridge, there needs to be a proportional zone area increase allotted to help small businesses and the professions. See list of existing businesses on Western Avenue.

**Family Businesses:** We filing this proposal because as a small family owned business, we found it impossible to find anything to buy as an office after years of renting space in the basement of the Old Cambridge Baptist Church. We wanted to stay in Cambridge in a live and work scenario and have our kids grow up in Cambridge. Collectively my wife and I have lived in Cambridge for 35 years now. In typical Cambridge fashion as a serial entrepreneur, I started The Boston Book Review in 1994 while still in grad school because I felt Cambridge/Boston should also have a national review voice besides the other two major book reviews out of New York. In year 2000, I won the MIT \$50k (now \$100k) competition and started a biotech company Eyegen/Genigma. In 2003, I spun out of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government the International Economic Alliance that helps bring investment dollars to emerging market economies. In 2007, I started Big Skinny, my skinny wallet design company. In 2012, I invented and patented an at home fitness device for adults and kids to keep my family fit—that turned into the Gorilla Gym company. Ironically, I moved to Cambridge to study Architecture and Urban Planning at Harvard's Graduate School of Design but changed to English Literature. In many ways, perhaps this is a Cambridge poster child situation in which we are asking the Cambridge City Council to help keep making Cambridge Cambridge.

## Conclusion:

**Cambridge to remain Cambridge:** Cambridge prides itself on the support of small businesses, entrepreneurship, and the professions; this extension of zoning will help maintain the distinctly entrepreneurial, upstart creative flavor of our local area. There are already 20 existing businesses on Western Ave. which is functionally similar to River St. which is already almost all zoned BA-3 yet only has 14 businesses. It is time to formally acknowledge and allow this small block of Western Avenue building owners the freedom to progressively choose the use of their buildings on this very public and busy artery that is geographically already predisposed to carry out this function. This block is only 3 blocks from Central Square at Mass Ave therefore geographically predisposed to commerce; our literal bookend neighbors from both sides are Beantown Taqueria, AJ Spears funeral home, Western Auto, Anytime Pizza.

Sincerely,

✓   
Kiril Stefan Alexandrov

✓   
Catherine Alexandrov

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4/11

Sign Joyce B. Patterson ✓  
Print Joyce B. Patterson  
Address: 162 Western Ave. Fl. 2

Sign Jacqueline Y. Patterson ✓  
Print Jacqueline Patterson  
Address: 162 Western Ave. Fl. 1

abutting  
&  
immediate  
neighbors  
on the block

4/11

Sign Noemi Rosa  
Print Noemi Rosa  
Address: 270 Western Ave Camb.

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✓ = Registered voters.



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4/2 Sign Anthony J Speers Anthony J Speers ✓  
Print Anthony J Speers  
Address: 132 Western Ave Camb. MA 02135

4/2 Sign Adelaide Speers  
Print Adelaide Speers  
Address: 132 Western Ave Camb. MA 02135

4/1 Sign Daniel Beauclerk  
Print Daniel Beauclerk  
Address: 14 Howard St Cambridge MA 02139 x

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Sign 

411 Print Domingo J. LOPEZ

Address: 212 Western Ave (Anytime Pizza) x

Sign Fawwaz Mahdi \* abutting R

412 Print Fawwaz - M. Abu - Rubayeh neighbor

Address: 144 Western Ave Cambridge 02139

411 Sign Chrystal Benedict ✓ R

Print CHRISTAL BENEDICT

Address: 135 Western Ave Cambridge MA 02139

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5/2  
Sign Jatun Alian  
Print Jatun Alian ✓  
Address: 306 Putnam Ave. Camb.

4/12  
Sign [Signature] R  
Print Travis Pogue  
Address: 9 Soden St X

4/2  
Sign [Signature] R  
Print Chris Fiore  
Address: 10 Soden St #27 A

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4/1 Sign Andrew Tarsy ✓  
Print Andrew Tarsy  
Address: 8 Howard Street ✓

4/1 Sign David Sears ✓  
Print David Sears  
Address: 4 Jay St.

4/1 Sign Nick Caramello ✓  
Print Nick Caramello  
Address: 6 Jay St

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4/12 Sign Courtney Hite R  
Print Courtney Hite  
Address: 3 Soden Place ✓

4/12 Sign Marc Lechner R  
Print MARC LECHNER  
Address: 3 SODEN PLACE ✓

Sign Sarah Miley  
Print Sarah Miley ✓  
Address: 172 Putnam Ave #1



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Sign

*James Thomas*

4/2 Print

*JAMES THOMAS*

Address:

*410 FRANKLIN ST CAMB*

4/2 Sign

*Judy Amendola*

Print

*JUDITH AMENDOLA*

Address:

*410 Franklin St. Cambridge, MA*

Sign

*Dennis M Freeman*

Print

*Dennis M Freeman*

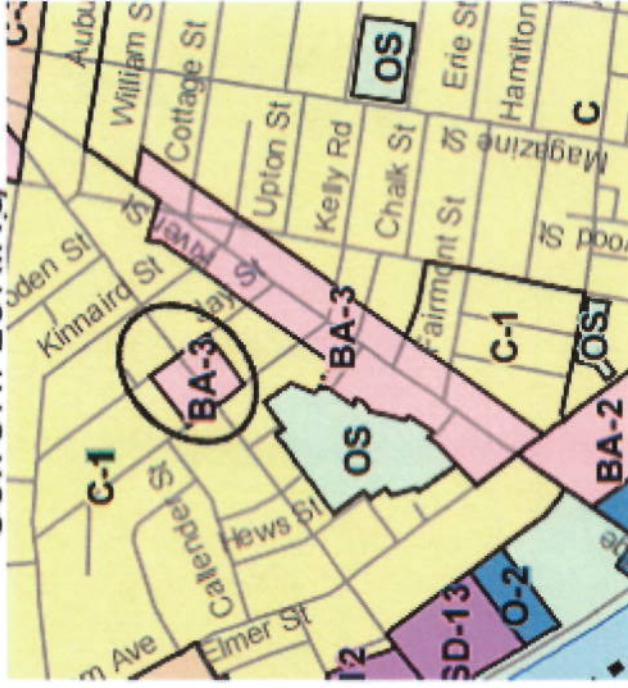
Address:

*15 Kinnaird St*

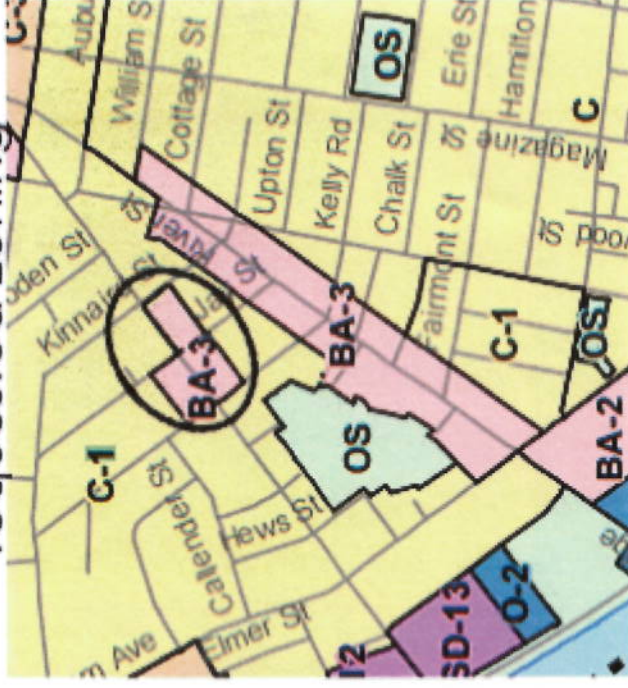
*\* abutting  
neighbor*

## ZONE EXTENSION

current zoning



requested zoning



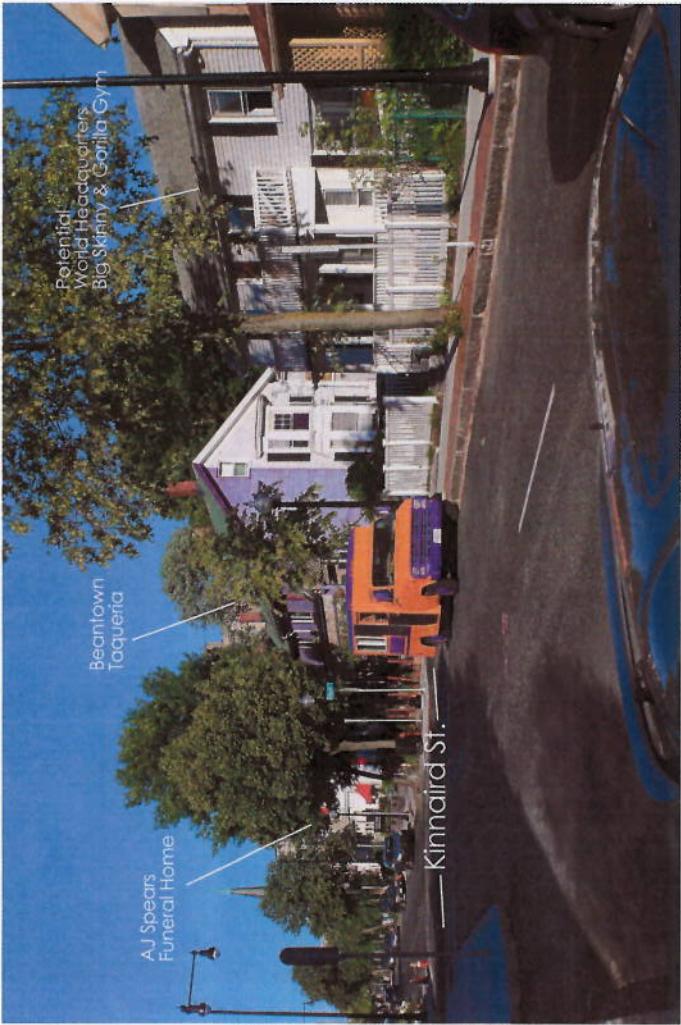
Our objective is to extend the existing BA-3 commercial zone that is currently between Howard Street and Jay Street by 1 block on the even numbered side to Kinnaird.

This change would affect only three properties:

- 158 Western Ave: Lot 125-25
- 162 Western Ave: Lot 125-24
- 168 Western Ave: Lot 125-23

There are no parking issues in this area, and none will be created by this change.





AJ Spears  
Funeral Home

Beantown  
Taqueria

Potential  
World Headquarters  
Big Skinny & Gorilla Gym

—Kinnaird St.—



—Jay Street

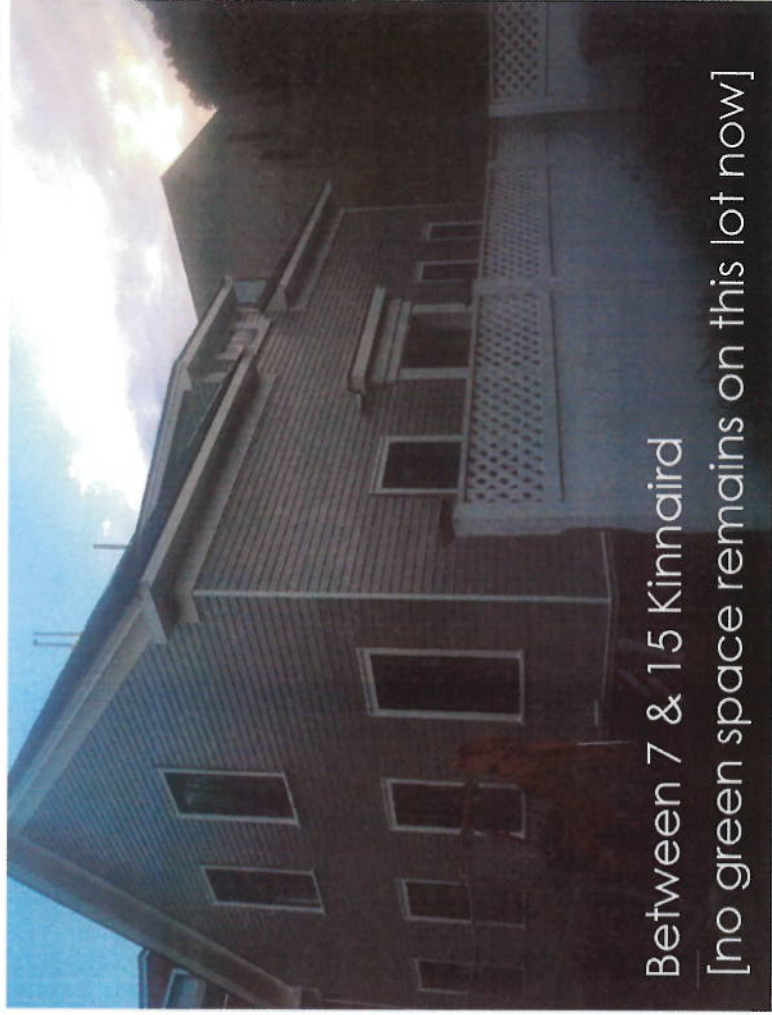
Western Ave  
Auto

Anytime Pizzo

—Howard St.—

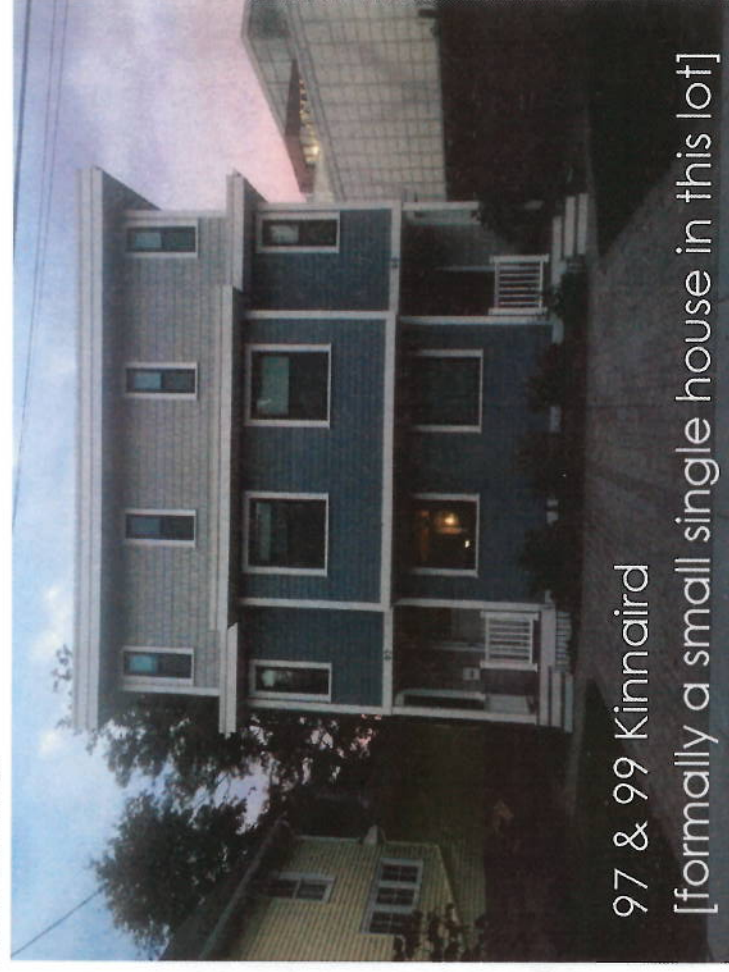


## BACK YARD BUILDING



Between 7 & 15 Kinnaird

[no green space remains on this lot now]



97 & 99 Kinnaird

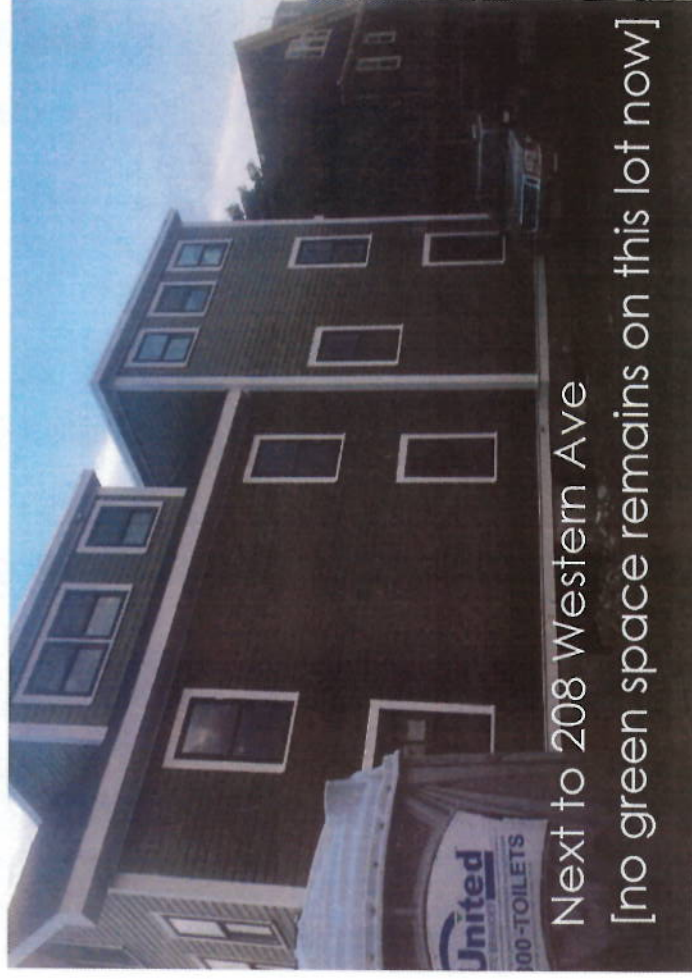
[formally a small single house in this lot]

**Just a few examples in our neighborhood alone, where the Cambridge variance board is allowing large scale residential building way beyond FAR and increasing residential housing density.**



33 Kinnaird

[recently purchased by developer who will put another large building in rear]



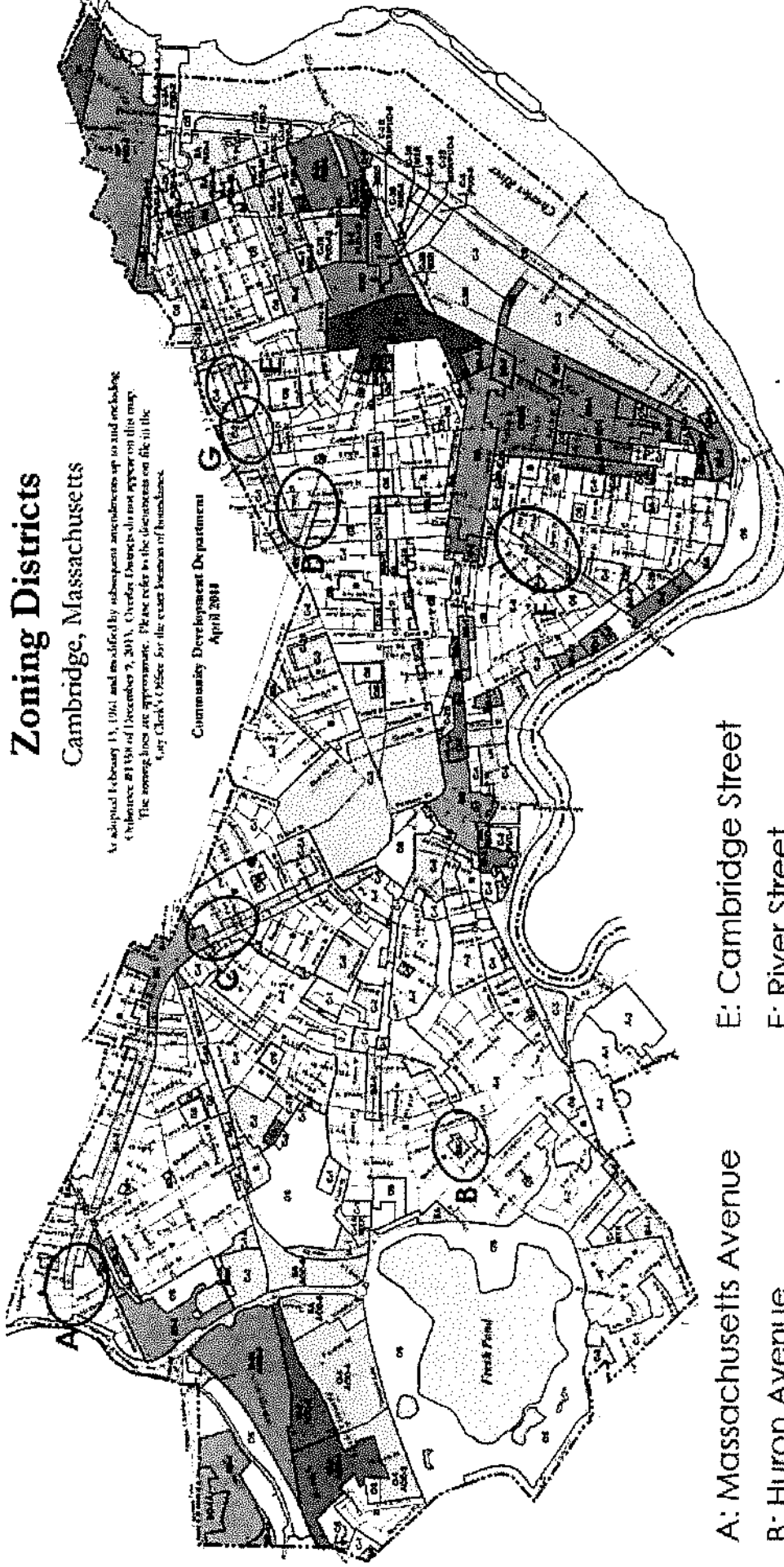
Next to 208 Western Ave

[no green space remains on this lot now]

# Zoning Districts Cambridge, Massachusetts

As adopted February 13, 1961 and modified by subsequent amendments up to and including Ordinance #1191 of December 7, 2013. Overlaid Districts do not appear on this map. The zoning lines are approximate. Please refer to the Department on file in the City Clerk's Office for the exact location of boundaries.

Community Development Department  
April 2018



A: Massachusetts Avenue  
B: Huron Avenue  
C: Massachusetts Avenue  
D: Hampshire Street

E: Cambridge Street  
F: River Street  
G: Cambridge Street

Precedent locations in Cambridge where business zoning has been extended by a block or less, on just one side of the street.